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**Non-territorial Foundations of the Political: Democracy under Overlapping Political Communities**

“The discourse of political community is deeply shaped by nationalism but has not included much critical examination of the implications of its nationalist inheritance”, Craig Calhoun claims. The conventional perception of political community, indeed, is highly associated with the concept of nation, which reflects the idea of pre-political nature of the people. The elaboration of this idea by the French revolution was aimed at overcoming the fundamental contradiction of democracy: it is unable to derive the legitimacy of its borders from itself. Nevertheless, according to G.I. Musihin, the concept of nation does not resolve the contradiction of democracy, only disguising it.

The recent events in Spain reveal the fact that the contradiction really exists. The regional parliament of Catalonia adopted a resolution on the creation of social security system and tax authority separated from the central government, in November 2015. The resolution was supposed to start building of the independent Catalan state. Thereafter the Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy made a statement, that the decision of Catalan deputies threatened democracy and violated political rights of Spanish citizens. The secessionists, in their turn, considered the secession as a pure act of democracy. The declaration of democracy implies the affirmation of a political community, perceived as a nation. Therefore, democratic procedures will face some obstacles to function correctly if it is still undefined who needs to follow these procedures. At this point *the problem of the democracy existence under overlapping political communities arises*.

I suppose that the spatial ontology of political community underpins the contradiction described above. I am going to show the concept of political community includes territorial component, which is mostly unreflected. Declaring “*we the people*”, modern liberal democracy inherits a medieval tradition, which considers the people as *corpus mysticum*, a mystical body and a king as a heart or a soul of the body. Royal jurisdiction spread strictly inside the territory of the kingdom and opposed the ideas of the empire or a *pax christiana*. The French revolution, having beheaded the king, turned people into a new subject of power and sovereignty; however, the foundations of political thinking were not altered. Michael Hard and Antonio Negri explain: “The spiritual identity of the nation rather than the divine body of the king now posed the territory and population as an ideal abstraction. Or rather, the physical territory and population were conceived as the extension of the transcendent essence of the nation”[[1]](#footnote-1). The affirmation of political community entails the territorial claim, and the single political community can occupy the single territory. As A.F. Filipppov notes, “Any principle of a political nation is, in the long run, the principle of the territorial nation-state”.

Republican and deliberative theories of democracy propose alternative conceptions of political community. Roman term *res publica* implied the understanding of the people not connected with physical space: the community was founded on the Ciceronian “common utility” and citizenship. The republican tradition was revived by Hannah Arendt, who believed the formation of the community to be started from the moment of establishing of the law. This idea shaped the farewell speech to those who had left the city for the colonies: “Wherever you go, you will be a polis”[[2]](#footnote-2). Nevertheless, the Arendt understanding of political community prevents it from overlapping: if new civil community arises inside the pre-existing one, it establishes a city wall and a separate democracy.

Deliberative theory of democracy, according to Jurgen Habermas, intended to mitigate all the drawbacks that two other concepts had. Epistemological assumption of Habermas’ philosophy is criticism of Cartesian subjectivism; in political theory, it appears in rejection of defining political concepts with relation to the subject. In particular, liberal and republican theories endow the political community with subjectivity, implying it is possible to have or obtain sovereignty. Deliberative theory, on the contrary, rethinks sovereignty as the subjectless form of communication[[3]](#footnote-3). Such bases of political unity as a commonness of destiny, shared values or conceptions of a good life are substituted by the agreement on the deliberation rules and the intention to establish intersubjectivity of a discursive agreement. Concerning the theoretical problem posed in the beginning, the notion of political community elaborated by Giorgio Agamben is worth mentioning. Agamben supposes, “the guiding concept would no longer be the *ius* (right) of the citizen but rather the *refugium* (refuge) of the singular”[[4]](#footnote-4). The similarities between theories of Habermas and Agamben will be discussed in the report.

Thus, spatial ontology characterizes a modern notion of political community as well as an array of other key political concepts – nation, sovereignty and state. This provokes the problem of the prospects for the democracy under overlapping political communities, which can be resolved with the help of the deliberative theory of democracy.

1. Hardt M., Negri A. Empire. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000. P. 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Arendt H. The Human Condition. Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1998. P. 198. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Habermas J. The inclusion of the Other. Studies in Political Theory. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1998. P. 251. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Agamben G. Means without End: Notes on Politics. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. P. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)